

FIVE CENTS

THE ROUND TABLE IN CANADA

AIM

The non-partisan study of
the problems presented
by the British Empire.

*How the Movement began.
What it hopes to accomplish.*

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Queen's University at Kingston

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All correspondence to be addressed to:

The Secretary, The Round Table, 84 St. Mary St., Toronto,

FOREWORD

THE men who comprised the original Canadian Round Table Groups held various views concerning the relation of Canada to the Empire, including the belief that national independence was the natural future of Canada. After six years of study, it is safe to say that the Groups now include no one who does not believe in maintaining in some form our Imperial connection. It must be remembered, however, that the organization is a movement to encourage study and that its students have reached different stages in their enquiry. Whatever propaganda members of The Round Table may be connected with as individuals, the movement itself must stand for nothing but the general principles which it has been thought wise to adopt as our own and to outline in the first chapter of this pamphlet.

I.

WHAT IS THE ROUND TABLE ?

The Round Table movement is an invitation to thoughtful men and women everywhere to join in the study of the meaning of the Empire and of the problems presented by it. It is not committed to any particular form of Imperial reconstruction, but it is committed to the cultivation of the fundamental idea that some system of Imperial union is a necessity.

The movement is represented by Groups of people formed first in the Dominions and afterwards in Great Britain, who believe that the British Empire shows a continuous development, that it is in a transitional stage, and that in its present form it presents a Problem. The voluntary co-operation of such Groups for investigation and study is a method which will appeal to everyone. The aim of these circles is simple and straightforward—the creation of a basis of popular education for the support of the statesmen to whom we entrust the handling of our future.

It is by no means necessary that the men and women comprising the Groups should have the same experience or the same training. They will have no difficulty in agreeing, in any case, upon the following general principles, which will provide a common starting point for the enquiry:

1. That Canada has shown her determination to preserve and strengthen the ties which now bind her to Great Britain and other portions of the British Commonwealth.
2. That effective organization of the Empire must not involve any sacrifice of responsible government in domestic affairs or the surrender of control over fiscal policy by any portion of the Empire.

3. That it is an inevitable development of responsible government in the Dominions that they should assume their proportionate share in the defence of the Empire, and should have a voice in determining its relations with other States.
4. That as soon as circumstances permit, political leaders throughout the Empire, irrespective of party, should meet to consider the problem.

The question of our national position is more urgent than ever. As one Canadian statesman has finely said, the War "has deepened our sense of destiny. We have swung out into the full current of the world's life: and whether we view with satisfaction or with apprehension the situation in which we find ourselves we can never retrace our steps. Let us face the future with courage and faith."

II.

THE ORIGIN OF THE ROUND TABLE

The system of Round Table Groups as they are known at present was developed in this country, but the conception of a systematic research into the nature of the British Empire which characterizes the Movement had its origin in South Africa. The enquiry grew out of the conversations of a group of men who played an active part in the organization of South Africa after the War. Their concern with the affairs of that Dominion soon grew into a careful study of the Imperial problem as a whole, and the character of these men, and their experience in practical politics, gave a note of seriousness to their efforts. In 1910 a collection of notes on the government of the Empire was made by these students of the question and printed for private circulation throughout Great Britain and the Dominions, under the name of the "Green Memorandum." This volume was subjected to private criticism in every part of the Empire and was then reissued with a mass of annotations attached. It was followed by numerous documents, all part of the same research, which were submitted to small circles of men in the Dominions who were asked to aid in The Round Table enquiry by criticizing these reports and giving their opinions on various phases of the Imperial problem. These circles were the original Round Table Groups.

Such opinions and criticisms as these were never officially published by The Round Table. Owing to the various opinions represented in the Groups such a course was impossible. One theory of the Empire held in whole or in part by certain members of The Round Table Groups has been admirably expressed in a book, "The Problem of the Commonwealth," published by Mr. Lionel Curtis, not as the General Secretary of The Round Table but solely on his own responsibility. This represents the personal opin-

is of one student of Imperial problems, and inasmuch as it goes into considerable detail, it is unlikely that others will be in complete agreement with it.

We are more immediately concerned with a second phase in the development of The Round Table proper. In 1911, mainly through the efforts of the late Mr. Edward Kylie, Groups of men were formed in Canada to study their country's relation to the Empire and to the outside world. In these circles the general question of our external politics was treated, and any literature which bore on this broad question was made the subject of study. The work of the new Groups was, therefore, not confined to The Round Table reports alone, although, as they comprised the most comprehensive study of the British Empire in existence, their importance was not overlooked.

With the War, The Round Table Groups in Canada can be said to have arrived at a third stage in their development. We have seen since August 4, 1914, that the Empire is a reality; but we have also been shown that its development has not reached finality. Whatever may be our opinions as to the ultimate solution of the problem it is now possible for its students to base their assumptions on such broad principles as are laid down in Chapter I.

The Round Table Groups, formed originally to study our relations with the British Empire, are now of greater importance than ever. As in every national crisis, if we are to be saved from the inevitable political catchword it will be because responsible Canadians have so informed themselves as to produce an educated opinion on the question at issue. Our self-education towards this end is therefore of profound importance. Not even the great task of developing our natural resources should obscure from us the necessity of understanding our position in the world at large—political as well as economic.

It may, of course, be argued that this is a time for deeds and not for words, that the German monster must be laid low before we can debate the academic question of Imperial organization. The answer to this is two-fold: first, that the question is not academic but sternly practical; and secondly, that those who cannot fight have a duty to perform in behalf of their fellow-countrymen overseas. On those of us who are left behind is laid the responsibility of determining, each for himself, what is the true status and what should be the destiny of this country. The Round Table Groups have been founded and are now being increased in number for the purpose of providing the means of study and discussion which are necessary to such an end. The work of these Groups, by reason of their non-partisan composition, is in the nature of a free enquiry. Whatever may be the conclusions of their members, their study will have accomplished much; for an informed public opinion is the best guarantee that Canada's future will be guided by sober judgment, and that her soldiers will not have fought vainly.

III.

THE ROUND TABLE POSITION

The work of The Round Table Groups up to the present might be described as a great co-operative analysis. It should go on to a serious and open-minded examination of the results.

The joint study of the Groups during the six years which have elapsed since their formation is contained in a series of reports sent out for criticism to these various study circles throughout the Dominion, and in a collation of this criticism which was again distributed to the Groups. Briefly, it may be said that this co-operative study detached four lines of possible Imperial policy:

1. It may be contended that the present status of the Dominions, with all its manifold anomalies and acknowledged defects, should nevertheless be left undisturbed.

2. It may be argued that the Dominions should take their future into their own hands and assume the position of independent states; or, in our own case, ask admission into the United States.

3. The time may have arrived when the Dominions should severally take over the control of their foreign policy, and co-operate to the extent to which they may on each occasion see fit.

4. Finally, some would argue that the principle of confederation, which has successively created the great Dominions, should now be extended to the Empire in so far as the questions of peace and war and foreign policy are concerned.

Whether the government of the dependencies can be detached from the control of the questions of peace and war constitutes another question of great importance.

The third alternative may be characterized as a policy of voluntary co-operation. It is to be noted that an alliance for defence, which the Groups have rarely considered, would differ from this in being voluntary only in its inception. It would operate automatically when the necessity for action arose.

In short, The Round Table movement aims to awaken a spirit of thoughtful consideration and candid, clear and persistent thinking on matters which every British citizen should have deeply at heart. It is the deliberate opinion of the Canadian Council of The Round Table movement that the question of the relation of the different Overseas Dominions to the Empire as a whole is rapidly becoming an exceedingly practical question, and that Canada will be obliged to express her opinion with respect to this matter within a very short time after the conclusion of the war.

For this reason the Council earnestly hopes that Round Table Groups may be formed in all parts of the Dominion, in order that public sentiment may become intelligent and Canadians be prepared, whenever the time for action comes, to take their full part in adapting the organization of the Empire to the tasks with which it will then be confronted.

IV.

THE ROUND TABLE QUARTERLY.

The first number of The Round Table quarterly was published in November, 1910. It was founded by a group of men who had undergone a memorable experience in South Africa at a great crisis in the history of the British Empire, and the purpose with which it was started has been steadily maintained. This purpose was, and is, to provide a continuous record, unspoiled by the influence of local party differences, of the larger affairs of the Empire as a whole, and of each of its great Dominions and Dependencies.

All those associated with the conduct of The Round Table have had this conviction in their hearts: namely, that there is a vital unity in this Commonwealth composed of a quarter of the human race; that the world is undergoing changes under which a continuance of the Empire's unity may demand reconstruction of its internal relations; that its preservation is of vital interest to all its parts, and to the peace and happiness of the world; and, finally, that under these circumstances the best service that can be rendered to the Empire is to provide reliable and non-partisan information of events and opinions within the Empire and in the world at large, so far as they mutually affect each other. And this is what The Round Table quarterly is doing.

Anyone who wishes either to join or to form a Round Table Group is invited to communicate with the Secretary, The Round Table, 84 St. Mary St., Toronto, who will furnish all necessary information.



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